

Travis County Poor Farm



txcompost.blogspot.com/2017/03/travis-county-poor-farm.html

This is a post of my history article for the March 2017 issue of the [NWACA Newsletter](#).

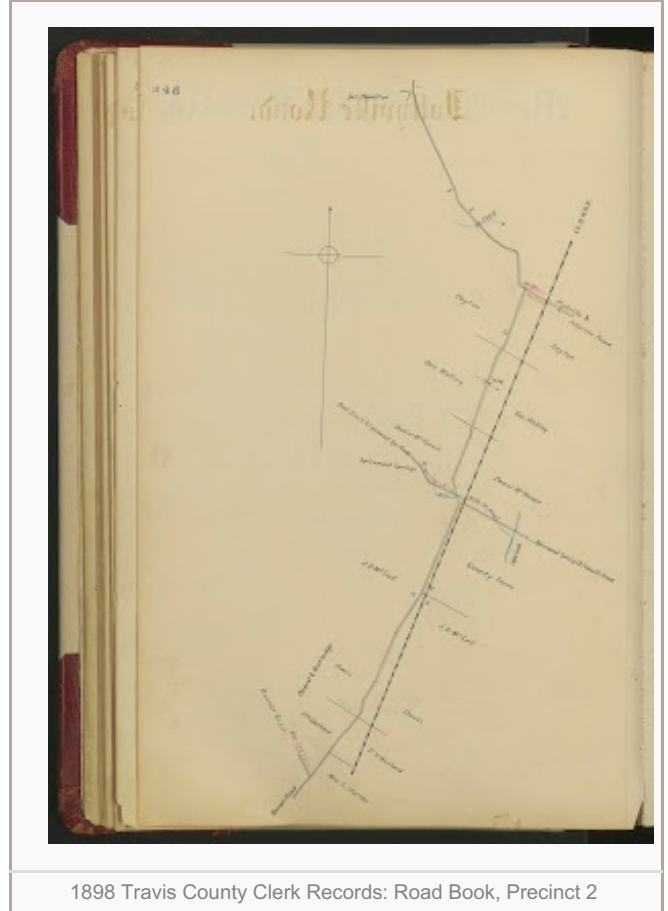
Back in the day, before the social safety nets to which we are accustomed today – food stamps, unemployment benefits, homeless shelters – there were “poor farms”. As Christy Costlow [1], Travis County Archivist, explains, “In the Constitution of 1869, the State of Texas directed the responsibility for the care of its indigent and poor residents to the counties. Aside from general provisions, there were no special statutes governing in detail relief for the poor. Based on the tradition of the almshouse, many county governments established poor farms, which provided the means for destitute inhabitants to live and work in an agrarian-based institutionalized setting. Those who came or were sent to poor farms, unless physically disabled, were expected to work the land to help support the institution.”

Michael Barnes at the Austin American Statesman has written about the Travis County Poor Farm that was north of Windsor Road in what is now Tarrytown, but it was not the first. The first Travis County Poor Farm was here, right next to our Northwest Hills neighborhood.

If you recall from my January 2017 article, George Washington Davis, an early settler of this area, received a land grant of 3,154 acres from the Republic of Texas for his service in the Texas War for Independence at the Battle of San Jacinto; a good chunk of our neighborhood being on that old land grant. In 1879 Travis County purchased about 303 acres from Davis to establish the first Travis County Poor Farm.

This is the same poor farm Wilbarger referenced in his classic *Indian Depredations of Texas* in describing the abduction of the Simpson children by Indians (December 2016 newsletter): “After the Indians had gone some six miles from Austin [they arrived at] Spicewood Springs, which is situated in the edge of the mountains, opposite where the poor farm of Travis County is located”.

So where exactly was the poor farm? 1898 road maps, part of the Travis County Clerk’s records, shows the location and layout. The west side was bounded by today’s MoPac railroad (then the Int’l and Great Northern; hence the name for Great Northern Blvd!). The northern boundary was a continuation of today’s Spicewood Springs Road east of the tracks running all the way to today’s Burnet Road. This portion of Spicewood Springs Road was a combination of today’s Foster Lane with a short jog north up to what is probably today’s Anderson Lane. The eastern boundary was today’s Burnet Road (then called Upper Georgetown Road; no I-35 back then .. this was how you got to Georgetown). And the southern boundary was what appears to be today’s Greenlawn Pkwy; one map shows it running all the way from the western side of the farm, next to the tracks, to Burnet Road, just as it does today. Shoal Creek ran north to south through the farm, no doubt providing a source of water for crops.

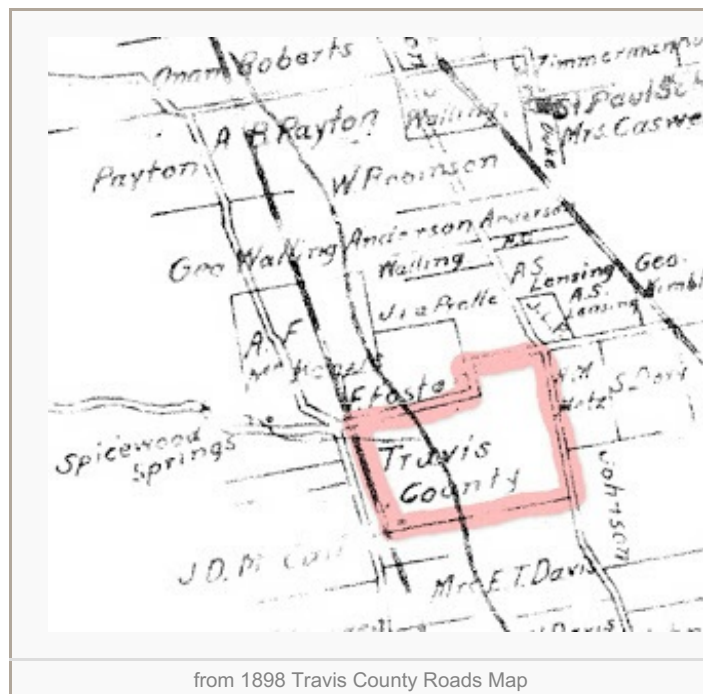


1898 Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book, Precinct 2

Photos

References, Notes

[1] Thanks to Christy Costlow, Travis County Archivist, for help in researching this article. Map shown is from 1898 Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book, Precinct 2. Purchase of land for poor farm is in Travis County Clerk Records: Commissioners Court Minutes D, p 218.



from 1898 Travis County Roads Map

The Portal to Texas History
Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Austin, 1885-86 - (Magnified)

Townsend Nelson D., surveyor, r. 300 E. North ave cor San Jacinto.
 Townsend Palmer G., h. Mrs. A. L. Townsend.
 Townsend Phoebe (c), wks A. L. Townsend, r. same.
 Townsend T. (c), r. nw cor E. Cypress, Onion.
 Townsend Nellie Miss, h. Alonzo Gerard.
 Travis County Courthouse, 1019 Congress ave cor Mesquite.
 Travis County Jail, sw cor Brazos, Mesquite, M. M. Hornsby, sheriff;
 D. R. Owens, head jailer; Hal Mason (c), asst jailer.
Travis County Poor Farm, 7 miles n of Austin.
 Travis County Road and Bridge Co., Eugene Bremond, prest; B. C.
 Ludlow, vice-prest; W. F. North, secy; E. T. Eggleston, treasr.
 Traynham John H., depy U. S. marshal Western dist of Texas, r. 405
 E. Bois d'Arc.
 Treefold Levinia (c), h. William Gordon.
 Trego Apigto, farmer, r. Mount Bonnell road w of city limits.
 Tribble DeWitt, painter, bds Mrs. M. Musgrave.
 Trigg Albert J. (Thompson & Trigg), bds Capital Hotel.
 Trigg Bingham (Smith & Trigg), rms R. S. Caperton.
 Trigg Johnson (c), waiter Carrollton House, r. same.
 Trimble Cornelia A. (wid David), r. 211 E. Apple.
 Trindell Charles (c), wks Lone Star brick works.
 Triplett Stonewall J., bkpr E. W. Swindells, bds James W. Lewis.
TRIPPE JOHN F., Land Agent, Office Room 11 over 500
 Congress ave, cor Pine, bds Hotel Brunswick. See advt.
 Troilo Vital, r. 104 Colorado.

IREBAUGH & CO.
CART & FILL SUP
WAGON & WOOD
Carpenters' Tools and

Snippet from 1885-86 General Directory of the City of Austin

arriving at that place, passed on just beyond to the top of the mountain, which being rocky, the citizens lost the trail and were never able to find where the savages went down the mountain. After the Indians had gone some six miles from Austin and had arrived at **Spicewood Springs**, which is situated in the edge of the mountains, opposite where the **poor farm** of **Travis county** is located, they brutally murdered the little girl in a horrible manner. They kept Tommie a prisoner for some eighteen months, when he was traded off to some Indian traders, who returned him to his mother. It was learned from Tommie after his return home that his little sister fought the Indians so desperately they determined to kill her. Tommie stated that he did all he could while at the **springs** to persuade his sister to calm down and not make such resistance, but all to no purpose. The Indians, he says, after remaining at the **springs** awhile, took his sister up on a hill some distance and in a short while came back with her scalp hanging to the saddle of one of the bucks. Judge Joseph Lee, in company with Tommie and a number of citizens, went out and succeeded in finding the remains after obtaining the above information from Tommie, which they had no trouble in identifying.

Wilbarger referenced the "poor farm" in his classic Indian Depredations of Texas